

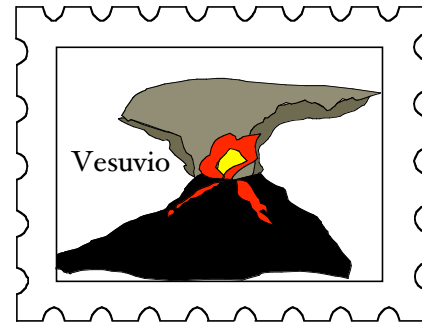
BUON GIORNO!

My name is Benito, and I live in Naples, a large city in Italy that is a little bit west of one of our country's two giant volcanoes, Mount Vesuvius (Mount Etna, located on the island of Sicily, is the other). It is my job to tell



Mount Vesuvius is the only active volcano on the Italian mainland.

you all about this 1,280-meter high (4,202 ft) mountain that is now about 17,000 years old.



Before I give you an introduction to the area, let me first ask you a question. Have you heard of the twin cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum? If they sound familiar, it's probably because they're famous for being destroyed by Mount Vesuvius back in the year 79 AD! Pompeii, which is about five miles from the volcano, was totally buried by hot gas, rock, and ash flows that probably rushed toward the town at speeds of over 160 kilometers per hour. Can you imagine that? What's so interesting about Pompeii and Herculaneum is that we didn't find

out that these cities even existed until the 17<sup>th</sup> century – a gap of over 1600 years! And it wasn't until recently that we figured out the story behind what happened.

So, the story goes something like this: at about midday on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 79 A.D., clouds of rock and ash erupted from Mount Vesuvius, billowing up to 32 kilometers (20 miles) into the air. It was around midnight when these clouds collapsed and sent hot gas, ash and lava down the mountain, - burying Herculaneum with 23 meters (75 ft) of debris! By the next morning, Pompeii was gone, too. When archaeologists uncovered the ruins of the two cities, it was like time had stood still. Dogs were chained to posts, loaves of bread were in ovens, babies were in cradles, and meals were still on tables. Two cities were preserved in stone by Mt. Vesuvius. We know so much about what happened because of the written account of Pliny the Younger, a survivor of the blast whose uncle died in the tragedy. He wrote about the events in a letter to a historian.



A computer generated depiction of the eruption of Vesuvius.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pompeii>

Interestingly, not many human remains were found in the two cities. For years after finding the ancient cities, scientists believed that the people feared the mountain, so most people tried to escape it. In 1982, my friend's dad, who is an archeologist, helped uncover the remains of

hundreds of human skeletons that were all crammed together at the ancient sea wall. Hundreds of people died trying to escape the rushing hot debris. Very sad, if you think about it!



Casts of humans killed by the eruption of Pompeii, Italy, in AD 79.

[http://www.msnucleus.org/membership/html/k-6/pt/hazards/3/pt3\\_3a.html](http://www.msnucleus.org/membership/html/k-6/pt/hazards/3/pt3_3a.html)

But our townspeople are far from being scared since the last time Mount Vesuvius had a major eruption was about 1,000 years ago (we had minor eruptions from 1913 to 1944). Scientists monitoring the volcano see no evidence of an eruption at this time, but it is always a possibility in the future. There are also lots of volcano-related earthquakes in the region, so we know that things are still moving and changing.

My aunt always refers to Mt. Etna and Mt. Vesuvius as the sister volcanoes with opposite personalities. Some call Mt. Etna the “gentle giant,” but Mt. Vesuvius is a much more dangerous and deadly volcano. Mudflows and lava flows

have destroyed cities and killed thousands of people.

Despite the possibility of volcanic eruption, this area is densely populated. People have lived here for thousands of years, and they still choose to live here. Since the volcano hasn’t been a threat recently, people have no trouble settling in and living around the mountain. In fact, we get tons of tourists around here that want to see the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum since they can’t fathom a city being “lost” and going undetected for over a thousand years. I don’t blame them!

People also come to live at the base of Mt. Vesuvius because the land is great for farming. The plants do well in the soft, nutrient-rich soil, and the Mediterranean Sea provides wonderful seafood. My mother makes a great dish with shrimp.

If you ever visit both Mount Etna and Mount Vesuvius, you will see a lot of similarities in the geology of the two areas. This is no coincidence, of course, when you see how close together these two huge volcanoes are. Etna and Vesuvius are two of Italy’s four active volcanoes, but Etna and Vesuvius are by far the most popular and well-known of the four.

If you ever come to visit, we could also take a tour of Rome! You’ll get to see the Vatican, the Coliseum, and all those other famous sights.

Hope that helped!  
Benito Del Piero  
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